

Internationalization and education from Japanese experiences

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Abstract

In the present day, every country has been inevitably facing into the era of internationalization. One of the features of this situation is that people as well as products could move quite easily across a country border. Internationalization contains a positive sign which people could get more open mind than ever before. But also it could be a negative sign that somewhat cultural background would be weakened. In this context, education should be one of the key issues to promote people getting an open mind on one side, and to preserve a domestic unique sense culturally originated on the other side. It will be examined from Japanese experiences that (1) is English language speaking a single way of internationalization? (2) how internationalization makes a balance with the national identity?

Key Words: conceptual model of internationalization, educational policy, Japanese experiences

1 Introduction

Japan has, like other EU countries, been facing to adjust the direction of internationalization for recent decades. One of the features of this situation is that people as well as products could move quite easily across any country borders. Internationalization brings a positive sign which people could get more open mind than ever before. But also it could bring a negative sign that somewhat cultural background would be weakened. In this context, education should be one of the key issues in order to promote people getting an open mind on one side, and to preserve an individual country-based different sense historically originated on the other side.

First of all, in this paper, I will point out some different models existing behind the concept of internationalization. Then I will describe from Japanese experiences about an interaction between internationalization and education in the following two aspects; (1)How internationalization affects education? (2)Does education affect the direction of internationalization?

2 Models as the concept of internationalization

2.1 Catch-up model

Japan has been used to recognize our eyes open occasionally to the international perspectives because of its geographical situations. At the early times, an origin of language, theoretical ideas, governmental systems in Japan were greatly influenced from continental China, and also since 19 century many ideas of living and systems from Western world were influenced to build the modernized Japan at that time. Most of the times, internationalization would recognize the same meaning of importing somewhat different things to Japan society.

Through these experiences, one of the actual model as internationalization would be raising up, which can be called “a catch-up model” or “a mainstreaming model.”

2.2 Competitive model

While the political linkages are growing in global scale than ever before, there are many competitive activities growing up, especially at the field of economics. Policy maker has modified to adjust own domestic situations towards a right direction for recent decades. Education was not an exception. I should urge that politicians weighted on education as one of the basic issues to rebuild their country more competitive than others. We have been witnessed that lots of reform issues in education field has been appearing and discussing in every countries.

From these ongoing situations, another model as the concept of internationalization would be counting, which can be called “a competitive model.”

2.3 Win-win mutual model

It is difficult to say what the exact meaning of “win” would be in our real life. I should mention that using the word of “win” here is only a symbolic usage. Or, I should say what we try to live together in mutual prosperity is the meaning of “win” in this context. Behind this concept, it shows what our world consists differently and uniquely in the way of living, culture, religion, language, and so on.

Some sort of practical sense connecting in this model is appearing at the education field. PISA (reading, math, and science international performance tests by OECD) and TIMSS (math and science international achievement tests by IEA) are good examples. These are not exact competition between attendant countries. While the results could count sincerely in each country, it would bring some policy discussion that what improvements should be needed by referring to excellent examples of other countries.

From the view point of these actions, it would be coming out as a third conceptual model of internationalization, which would be named “a win-win mutual model.”

3 How internationalization affects education?

At the time of internationalization, people as well as products could move easily across any country borders. Also it is characterized these days as the Information Age, in which ICT as well as mass media has a great influence to promote that people could find out the way of internationalization in their mind by themselves.

Public education constructs one of the significant standpoints what internationalization should be, especially for the future generations. Otherwise, individual experience would make a limited knowledge to sketch what all about internationalization is. In this aspect, education is becoming a strategic matter as a part of public policy.

One of the most concerned issues is language, which people can communicate each other whose mother language is different, in terms of a whole societal capability as well as individual performance. There is hundreds of language lively using in the world. Even so, it is not impossible to communicate what different languages we are used. But it will run up

against a wall because of a limited mutual understanding, if the communicative language is not using. In the result, a useful language should be concerned in any situations of internationalization. Language is the most symbolic issues in the process of intercultural communication.

In these days, English language is likely to be occupied the advanced condition. It could be some reasons raised up why English has a practical position of usefulness. It is not because of inhabitant scale who speaks English language as a mother language.

Japan is one of the symbolic cases, which own language is fundamentally different from English. Characteristic writing, grammar, and pronunciation are completely different. However, English has been the most major foreign languages which almost all students have learned as a subject in the public school. As everyone easily guesses, it has not been successfully learned for most of students in the practical experiences. In the time of internationalization, it needs more strategic reconstruction as a useful communicative language. General policy aspect of education has been shifted to this reconstruction, but of course it needs to take a time for improving a whole situation even within one society.

For the reason to accelerate these present situations, government has initiated to make a special zone of re-regulation where to permit any experimental activity independently. In my city, Kanazawa-city, it gets a permissive status to start early English learning as a new subject from the 3rd grade in every public school. Students commonly begin to learn English from the secondary school, which is started 4 years later. City supplies and manages its finance in order not only to train all primary teachers to get a teaching skill for English lessons but also to hire hundreds of English teaching assistants. This year 2005 is the second year to initiate this re-regulative experiment. It could find some good results from this challenge after several years. Then a successive story of those activities will be examined and be prevailing to another region.

As the case of language learning in public school, internationalization affects very much recent policy making in the field of education.

4 Does education affect a direction of internationalization?

It is a difficult question how to define a concept of education. Even so, it is one of an applicable definition that the aim of education is to promote individual abilities of people more accessible to the real world. On the other hand, it contains another aim; that is, as a society to preserve a cultural background in the next generations. Public education is a great system to maintain both individual and social capability. In this context, it seems that both internationalization and education include a quite similar conception in terms of how to manage the process of globalization; acceleration and breaking.

Of course, it is not an easy task to accelerate towards internationalization. It is, however, one of the hardest questions how to keep a balance between internationalization and nationalization. Education should find a better way of making a balanced direction.

From Japanese experiences, public policy not only takes a firm stance to internationalization, but also put on an accent to a national identity such as a national flag and anthem. It might be interesting that there had been no legislation about them. One of the reasons is that Japan used to have a mentality to accept “a catch-up model.” But legislators set such regulation a couple

years ago, while making a firm direction to internationalization. According to this regulation setting, some regions have taken a strong step to weight on a national identity in public schools. Some schools within these regions sometimes struggled how to manage specific local policy concern.

In the time of internationalization, education will be inevitably facing this kind of challengeable situation, and will find a right direction from a mount of practical experiences in the education field.

5 Conclusions

Making a well-balanced step to internationalization would be a hard question in every country. Especially for key actors, they should deeply concern how to handle the process of internationalization. What to resolve the following twofold tasks would be the key elements; first, mutual development both individual and society, and secondly mutual understanding both national identity and inter-cultural relationship. Internationalization needs the sense of compound eyes to the extent as possible. In this context, the answer what to manage the process of globalization would be not only one, but “a win-win mutual model” of internationalization should be counted as the challengeable and successful one than any other model.